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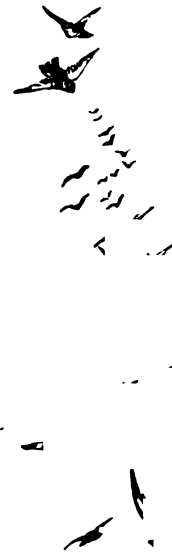
ONE OF THE NESTS WE FOUND.

HOW WE WENT BIRDS'-NESTING

FIELD, WOOD AND MEADOW RAMBLES

BY
AMANDA B. HARRIS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY G. F. BARNES



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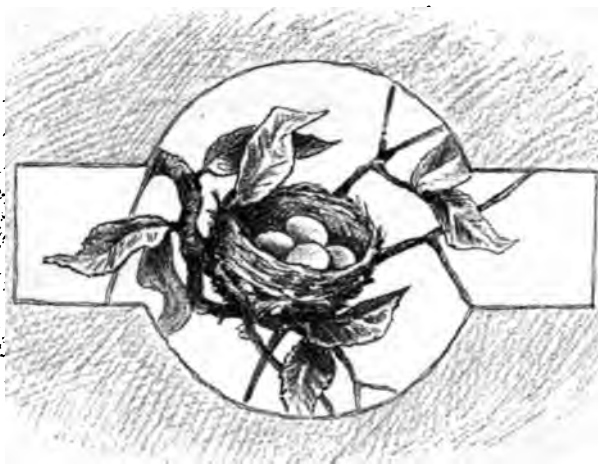
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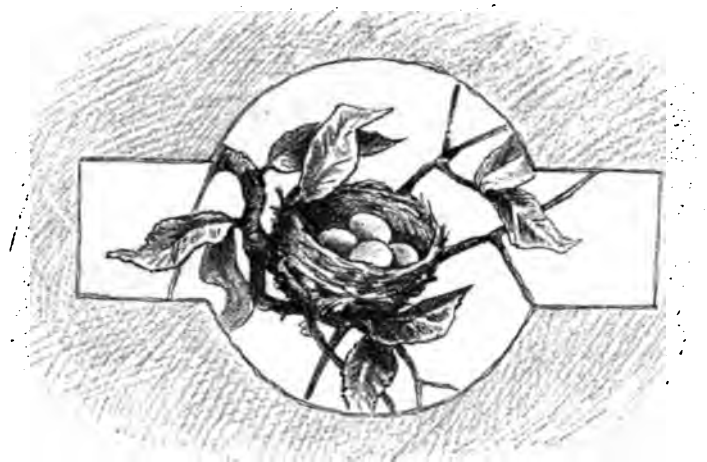
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With Compliments of the Publishers

and of Geo. F. Barnes



HOW WE WENT BIRDS'-NESTING.

I.

THE PEWEE, THE PARTRIDGE, AND THE WHIP-POOR-WILL.

ONE happy summer, out of pure love for wild birds and a desire to know more about their ways, especially of nest-building, we two girls spent weeks in wandering over miles of country, through woods and across meadows and along the banks of streams; and I must say they were among the best spent as well as the pleasantest of our lives.

We hunted for ourselves, waited patiently, and watched and observed keenly. We met with many discouragements, to be sure. As we had no books on ornithology, and no one to tell us, we were too early for some of the little architects and too late for others from not knowing their times of building, and so just missed of the nest, as was the case with the chick-a-dees, which we tramped hours and hours to find, prying into every stump and hole in a tree, not finding because we were too early, and then not finding because we were too late—and, I may as well add, have never found at all.

Then, again, we were baffled and misled by the artful birds themselves. I am ashamed to have to say it—but a thrush beguiled us rods away from her nest till she got us

HOW WE WENT BIRDS'-NESTING.

into a thicket of briars, and then slipped noiselessly back and left us to our fate; and we followed bobolinks over a spongy meadow all one afternoon, searching every place where they settled in the grass, and—we had the delight of the sweet, gushing, inspiring notes that dropped and lingered on the air, and the sight of the joyous birds floating and dipping, but never a nest!

I.—THE PEWEE.

But *one* bird we were always sure of—one can't help finding a pewee's nest.

Perhaps overhead in the verandah, or in a brace of your wood-shed or corn-barn or any out-building; but certainly under a bridge. There was not a bridge in all that region where we did not find one—and never *but* one.

I said *we*, but my companion, being timid about water, shirked that part of our undertaking. So it became with me a matter of determination never to miss a single bridge—and the country hereabouts abounds with them, so many are the mountain brooks; besides, I wanted to know from actual sight whether *every* bridge had its nest, and to see how nearly alike the nests were, all of which I accomplished. I also found that there was never but one bird to be seen—one lonely pewee in that dusky retreat above the plashing water, brooding patiently over the eggs, while the mate was abroad—who knows where?

How many dark places I explored, pressing through tangled brakes, and standing on slippery stones, waiting till my eyes became accustomed to the gloom and could spy out the things they sought. Sometimes the bird would fly off, and after skimming a few minutes over the water would return to her nest, but always in silence.

Our most satisfactory experience was when, after ascertaining that a certain nest was directly under the bridge, we went up and by our united strength lifted a plank and looked into it. The bird was absent, or we should not have done this. There were five



THE PEWEE.

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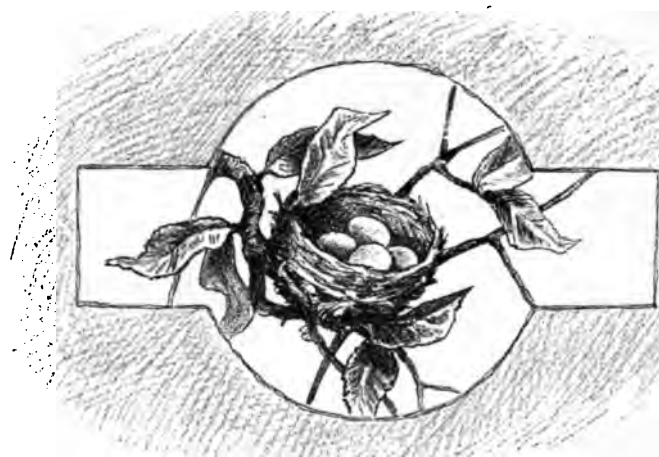
THE PEWEE.

eggs, perfectly lovely in tint and shape. When we speak of the shape of birds' eggs, it is natural to suppose that they are much after the same type, but it is not so. Some are nearly round, others are elliptical, some of a simple oval, and many almost pear-shaped. Those of the pewee vary in different nests, but are always delicate, being of a creamy white, tinged with flesh color at one end almost as if there were a pink lining to the dainty shells and it was shining through, an almost definite line showing where the roseate wave begins.

This was on the third of June—for we put down the dates—and we had reason to think that the pewees that built under bridges were later than those who chose places around the houses. We know of one house-pair that commenced to lay their foundations early in March, working diligently till a sudden cold snap came on, freezing the ground so that they could get no more clay, when, quite discouraged, they abandoned it wholly. They need to start in good season if they mean to raise two broods, as they often do, for they appear to be slow builders, perhaps waiting for their walls to dry as they go along.

The nests differ much in the matter of delicacy and finish, just as does the work of men and women, although, of course, they are always of clay mixed with hair, on the same principle that a plasterer uses it in his mortar—the first plasterer, very likely, having learned from the bird in some far-off time.

The nicest pewee nest we saw—on the last day of May—was just inside the eaves of a piazza at the back door of a farm-house, so low down that by standing on tip-toe you could reach into it with your hand; and there were hatched two broods the summer before, though a dog made the steps his lounging place, two cats kept a watchful eye on the eaves, persons were often going in and out, and the farm-hands sat there and smoked during their noonings. This beautiful specimen of bird-masonry was of clay brought from the door-yard, held together with white hair shed by a certain old horse



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3

THE PARTRIDGE.

evidently an ancestral home for generations of them, and it was distinguished by a name of its own, "Pewee Rock."

II.—THE PARTRIDGE.

One of our discoveries that same May was the nest of a bird whose haunts one may know well, and yet vainly search for the secret spot where she lays her eggs—we were fortunate indeed when we found our first and only partridge nest.

These birds have come to our door-yard in winter, driven by stress of hunger, have fed on the buds of our one pear-tree, and sought shelter at night on the roost with our hens; but at their own home in their summer retreat they have proved the shyest of all winged creatures.

We had always been used to starting them up, and their "drumming," and the rush of their stiff, swift wings, had been familiar sounds to us in a certain wild kind of pasture whose covert of dry woods, hanging on the edges of a swamp, was a favorite feeding ground of theirs, but the most vigilant search among the fallen leaves and by the side of old logs had never before resulted in our finding a nest.

It was, therefore, a great surprise when the thing happened at last—"happened," because it was by the merest accident. We were gathering trailing arbutus on the skirts of a pine grove through which wound the often-travelled wood-path to the swamp, when the mother flew up not three feet from us. If she had only kept her position a few minutes longer we should never have seen that nest full of eggs. Shy indeed was she, though so close on that road-way, for she had chosen her place with wise forethought, having a rock at her back, a cluster of yard-high blueberry bushes and sweet-fern around her, and the ground all about of the color of her own mottled and russet plumage—so like it that against the rusty brown of the pine needles and the tawny hue of the fallen oak leaves it would never have shown if she had sat still.

HOW WE WENT BIRDS'-NESTING.

We parted the shrubs and beheld fourteen eggs in a shallow basin, partly a natural hollow, partly rounded and smoothed by her own skill; and the hollow was carpeted with soft pine-needles, over which was laid a thin covering of the small feathers from her own breast.

The eggs were about the size of doves' eggs, and of a dull pale buff color without blotch or mark. We left them undisturbed, but returned to take a peep twice during the following week, when we saw her liquid eyes all alert; but the third time, when we hoped to catch a glimpse of the brood—though we might have known better—there were only bits of shell. She had stolen away with her little ones who can run and hide an hour after they have chipped through the walls of their prison, and we might as well have hunted for the end of the rainbow, or looked for a cloud that was in the sky last year.

III.—THE WHIP-POOR-WILL.

Our greatest triumph, however, was when we found the whip-poor-will sitting on her two eggs.

It is not a piece of every-day's luck, as we were told by an experienced naturalist who had never seen such a sight himself, or even been able to obtain an egg for his collections.

We were searching in a dense sort of coppice between the highway and the railroad embankment—a good place for birds, where we saw a great variety, and of which I shall have more to say by and by. The underbrush was very close down towards the track, but in the middle of the wood, though thick at the top, it was open enough for us to pass about with ease. The earth was covered with dry, faded leaves, faded to a dark grayish buff—the least noticeable of all colors, indeed of no color.

From these a bird rose, flew low for a short distance, with uncertainty, as if venturing



THE WHIP-POOR-WILL.



THE WHIP-POOR-WILL.

in the dark—which *might* have been the case, though we have cause enough for believing that she was trying to lead us away—settled on the ground, then rose again, and we followed. One would have thought her half asleep, for she seemed not only too feeble to fly without resting, but too drowsy to start again; yet farther and farther on she went, and we kept near until we had had a good look at her—a clumsy, homely creature, showing off all her awkwardness in feigning such stupidity, dressed in dull brown, singularly marked with blotches and bands of black and of yellowish-white, and with a short triangular bill like a wedge.

Having seen enough of her, we retraced our steps, and after seeking long saw her eggs. Nest there was not. She had laid them in a dry place on the ground where there was hardly enough of a depression to keep them from rolling away like marbles at the first touch; of course the bird knew what she was about, but it looked to our eyes a very risky proceeding. There were two—I believe the whip-poor-will never lays more—and they were the handsomest eggs we had ever seen, the ends uniform in shape, of a pearly ground freckled all over with lavender, and having lavender and chocolate running together in cloud-like blendings at one end.

This was on the last day of May; and before we had time to re-visit the place she too had hatched her young and departed.

But other birds remained—vireos, cuckoos, cat-birds, thrushes; and pleasant experiences were in store for us through the bonny month of June.

II.

THE CUCKOO, THE VIREO, THE CAT-BIRD AND THE SANDPIPER.

WE had a great day of it hunting for nests on that thirty-first of May. I am particular about giving the date, because we meant to be accurate and so we noted down everything on the spot, not only the day of the month, but all about the place, the birds, the nests, and the eggs.

We went equipped for our business, wearing strong dresses and shoes, and shade-hats securely tied down; and we each carried a basket, one containing lunch enough for all day, for going on such a tramp was hungry work; the other was to bring things home in—"things" meaning roots, mosses, vines, flowers, and any decorative bits we chose. It also held the rubber over-shoes which we took along for emergencies, as there was no knowing where we might venture, going through swamps or even wading a river; also into it I always slipped a jack-knife and some strings, for which I was invariably laughed at, especially about the strings, which, nevertheless, were sure to come handy; finally something which must by no means be left out of this record, viz.: a transplanting trowel, which "had been in the family," as they say of jewels, more than fifty years. It had been lost and found as many times, consequently it had become highly valued, insomuch that our sole anxiety in all our excursions was about this precious relic, and our only worry was from the fear that we might lose it.

HOW WE WENT BIRDS'-NESTING.

On that eventful day we first went to the tangled wood I have spoken of, where we discovered the whip-poor-will. It was hardly a mile from the village, and it not only bordered on the main thoroughfare but was within a stone's throw of two houses, and close by were cornfields where men were often at work; so that in one sense it was a very exposed place, although in another it was a very secluded one. The railroad was back of it, just where the ground made an abrupt descent into a strip of marsh; then the river fringed with alders and willows; then a belt of meadow.

This little wild, being a useless piece, neither field nor pasture nor woodland, had been left to itself in the midst of cultivation; and if it had been made for the sole use of birds it could not have served its purpose better. There were only three or four acres of it, bog and all, but as Thoreau once said about Concord, that he could find everything worth knowing within its limits, so we began to think before the season was over that there was at least a *possibility* of getting a sight of almost any inland bird of New England within that circumscribed district.

Both land and water-birds built there, undismayed by the sounds of life going on so near them—the carriages on the highway, or the rush of the cars which fairly shook them in their nests; and our experience seemed to justify us in the conclusion that the place to find the nests of even some shy birds is near the haunts of men, and further, that where we found one we were pretty sure of many others in the neighborhood. At any rate there seemed to be a gregarious spirit in this matter, even with varieties whose habits are supposed to be solitary. It was astonishing how much family life was being lived there, and equally a surprise to us that each separate pair were attending to their own business as if there were no others in the world; and it was so still there! The birds that were not brooding over their nests slipped about quietly, as if intent on business which demanded the utmost silence and mystery.

There were not only cat-birds, cuckoos, thrushes, yellow-birds, vireos, brown-and-white

THE CUCKOO.

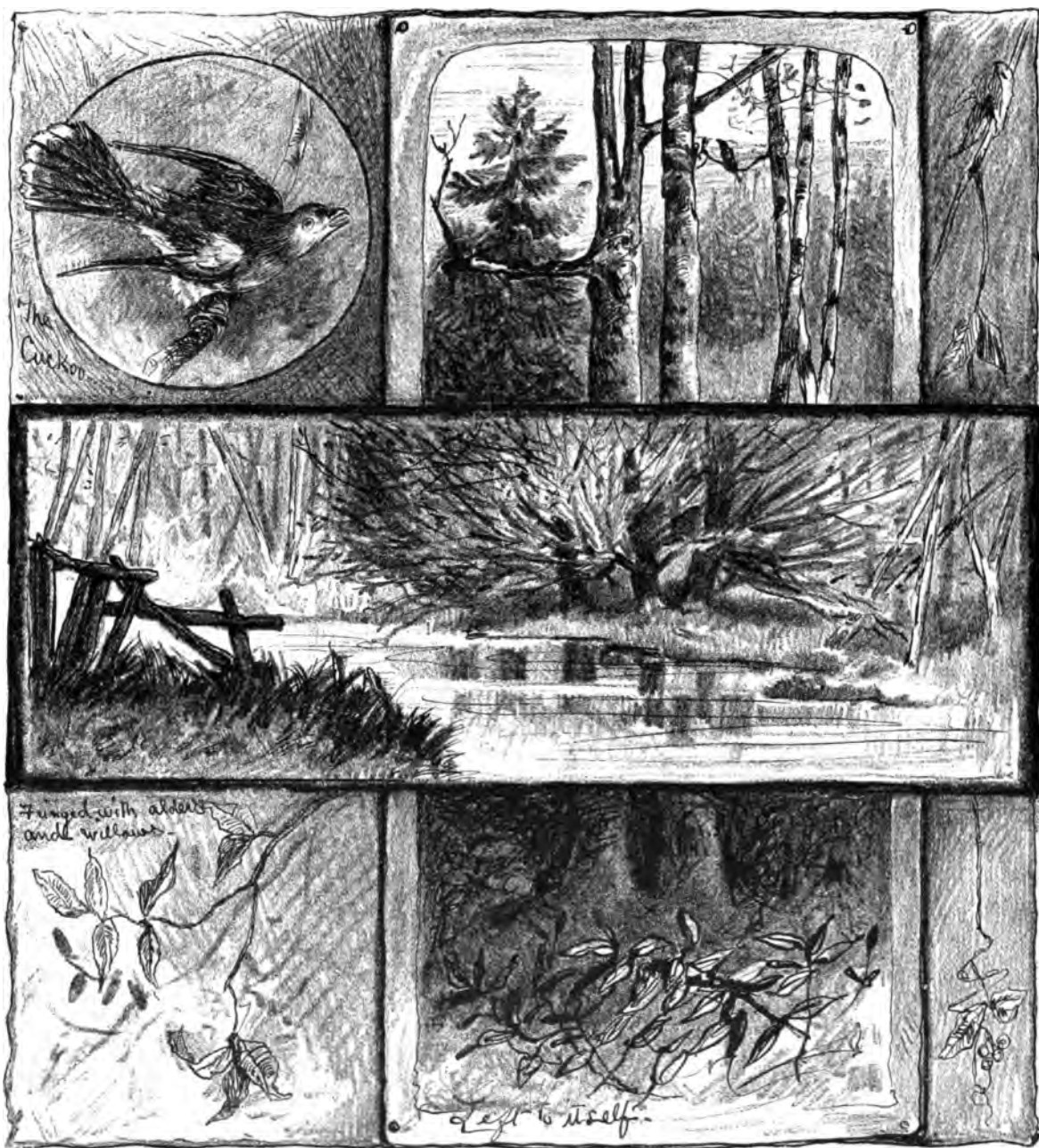
creepers and sparrows, but king-birds, sandpipers and bank-swallows, besides many others whose names were unknown to us; and even a scarlet tanager came; and on that same day in May we started up a pair of Blackburnian warblers from the darkest covert on the bank, but though we waited long and wore ourselves out in struggling through the briary thicket they were too crafty for us, and in following where their flame-bright plumage showed in the green gloom we strayed hopelessly away from their nesting-place which we were never able to find.

I.—THE CUCKOO.

It was not twenty feet away from the whip-poor-will that a most elegant bird flew up—a bright, large-eyed, lovely creature, leaving exposed in the shabbiest of nests four eggs of a wonderfully beautiful blue.

Those blues of birds' eggs—what inimitable tints they have, and no two blues alike! There is the true robin's-egg blue; and the dark, metallic green-blue of the cat-bird; the pure, almost shining hue of the hermit-thrush, which seems of pale green and azure blended, hinting of both colors and belonging to neither; and the painted pea-green deepening fairly into blue, of the cuckoo; and I know not how many more, in shades innumerable, and no more to be defined than those of a cloud or a flower.

It was a cuckoo's nest we had come upon, in a place so open that the sun shone on it through the thin tree-tops. It was built in a low hemlock about a yard from the ground, in plain sight, with not the least attempt at concealment. It was so slightly put together that it seemed impossible it could bear the weight of so heavy a bird—only a few dry sticks and rusty brown rootlets such as might have been pulled from some old tree torn up by the roots; no moss or lining of any kind, or anything softer than those wiry fibers. They must be thick-skinned younglings who could bear so hard a cradle, we thought, and such we afterward found them.



THE CUCKOO.

HOW WE WENT BIRDS'-NESTING.

That nest was a thing to be ashamed of—and to think of it as belonging to *her*! I am sure that in our northern woods it would be hard to find another such stylish bird; with her long and slender form, her fine long bill, and long, handsome tail, she is certainly what might be called “very distinguished looking.” And then her movements are so dignified and composed, and she has such a high-bred air, that she is the lady among the feathered people of our region. Then, again, her attire is in such perfect harmony with this symmetry of proportion and stateliness of manner as to give her an appearance of refinement and delicacy—which may be true of her character or it may not; I am speaking on the strength of an acquaintance formed and matured in two interviews, during which her behavior was charming. We studied her for an hour that morning. She had no fear of us, and would immediately have returned to her nest, but her mate, who had at once appeared, kept up cautionary signals. After flying a few yards away she gradually dismissed the distance between us by slipping from bough to bough, so noiselessly that we could not hear so much as the rustle of her wings, and then sat placidly regarding us, just where the sunshine fell on her ashen white breast, making it wave and glisten like watered silk, and on the brown of her wings and tail, which glowed as if they had been bronzed. A week later we made her another visit, when we were favored with a sight of her fledglings—four as homely creatures as ever were hatched, but which, notwithstanding, she seemed very tender of, although her poor preparations for them would lead one to think her lacking in maternal instinct.

II. — THE VIREO.

Of all the nests—robins' excepted—those of the vireos most abounded. We found them everywhere, in all woods and by all waters, and we made quite a collection of the deserted ones; they seemed too pretty to be left behind, and as the owners had no further use for them we cut off the branches and brought them home.

THE VIREO.

These nests were all alike, with a difference. In other words of about the same type and size. All the vireos build hanging nests, the material for the frame-work being much the same, while the lining and the outer finish vary greatly. The place oftenest selected is towards the end of some flexile bough of a tree, or on an alder or witch-hazel, or some such withy kind of wood. The bird begins in the angle where two small stems separate like the letter V, winding around them for a distance of perhaps three or four inches narrow ribbons of some tough inner bark which she knows best where to collect. She knots these fibres by one of those bird-nooses which no human hands can either tie or untie, and then sticks them fast by some gluey secretion she has among her own personal resources—and the result is that no winds or rains are able to detach these pensile structures from their fastenings till they are beaten and rotted to rags. In addition to this the prudent builder makes security doubly strong by looping her cords to out-lying twigs, just as tent-ropes are stretched to the pins.

Next she fashions within this frame-work an oval basket, which hangs from its rim like a tiny hand-net, made strong as a hempen web and as elastic and springy as if woven of hair; and now the most essential part being done, she seems to cast her eyes about to see what there is lying round for finishing, appropriating almost any soft and pretty thing she sees. In one we found strong fibres of black sheep's wool, in another strands of bright-colored shawl-fringe; in some of them pieces of newspaper with the reading still fresh and distinct, so that the occupant had ample means of indulging her literary taste while tending her little ones—in fact, a great deal of printer's ink comes to an unlooked-for use in these dainty habitations, so that it is by no means impossible that some future vireo may read an account of herself on the walls of her own house. Some of the most delicate substances which are incorporated in the nests are the tow-colored bits pinched from hornets'-nests, and bunches of caterpillar's silk, and white, fluffy down from cocoons, all worked in with fibres of bleached grasses and the curling outer



THE VIREO.

HOW WE WENT BIRDS'-NESTING.

bark of birch trees, the fine thin films of which are much used, giving the nests the appearance of being trimmed with tiny ruffles in shining yellow or pure chalky white.

The daintiest one we found upon the tip of an alder bough; and just above it had grown out a leaf which so completely hid it that if the wind had not turned up the leaf just as we were passing we should never have seen it. The dove-eyed little mother was sitting in this lonely place under the green awning, rocked like Baby Bunting by every breeze, patiently biding her time.

We did not disturb her, but after she had done with it we brought her cunning house away to see what curious thing it was that helped towards binding its walls together, which proved to be a strip cut crosswise from a costly and handsome silk sash, white plaided with colors. It had evidently been trimmed off the end and had been swept out-of-doors, and the tasteful builder, spying the treasure, had borne it to the far-off nest, weaving it in so close that it could not be removed without spoiling the structure. This was an uncommonly nice nest, almost air and water-tight, lined throughout with the dead straws which the hemlock sheds, fallen pine-needles, and the finest roots and horsehair, and it was as smooth and round as a cup.

Our first vireo, who had built far out on a low maple branch, had not done so artistic a piece of work, but she was such a mild and friendly creature that she let us look in upon her—a sweet, modest matron in faint ashen plumage beneath, and olive green on her back. She had five small lovely eggs of her own, of pearly white spattered with chocolate, which settled into heavier spots at the larger end; and besides these there was one that did not belong to her—larger and not so pretty, pale, greenish gray, slightly dingy indeed, speckled thickly with reddish brown—for the poor vireo had been imposed upon by the cow-bunting, who, on the watch for an opportunity, had slyly dropped an egg into the nest during the absence of the unsuspecting owner, and left it for her to hatch and then rear the intruder with her own little ones.

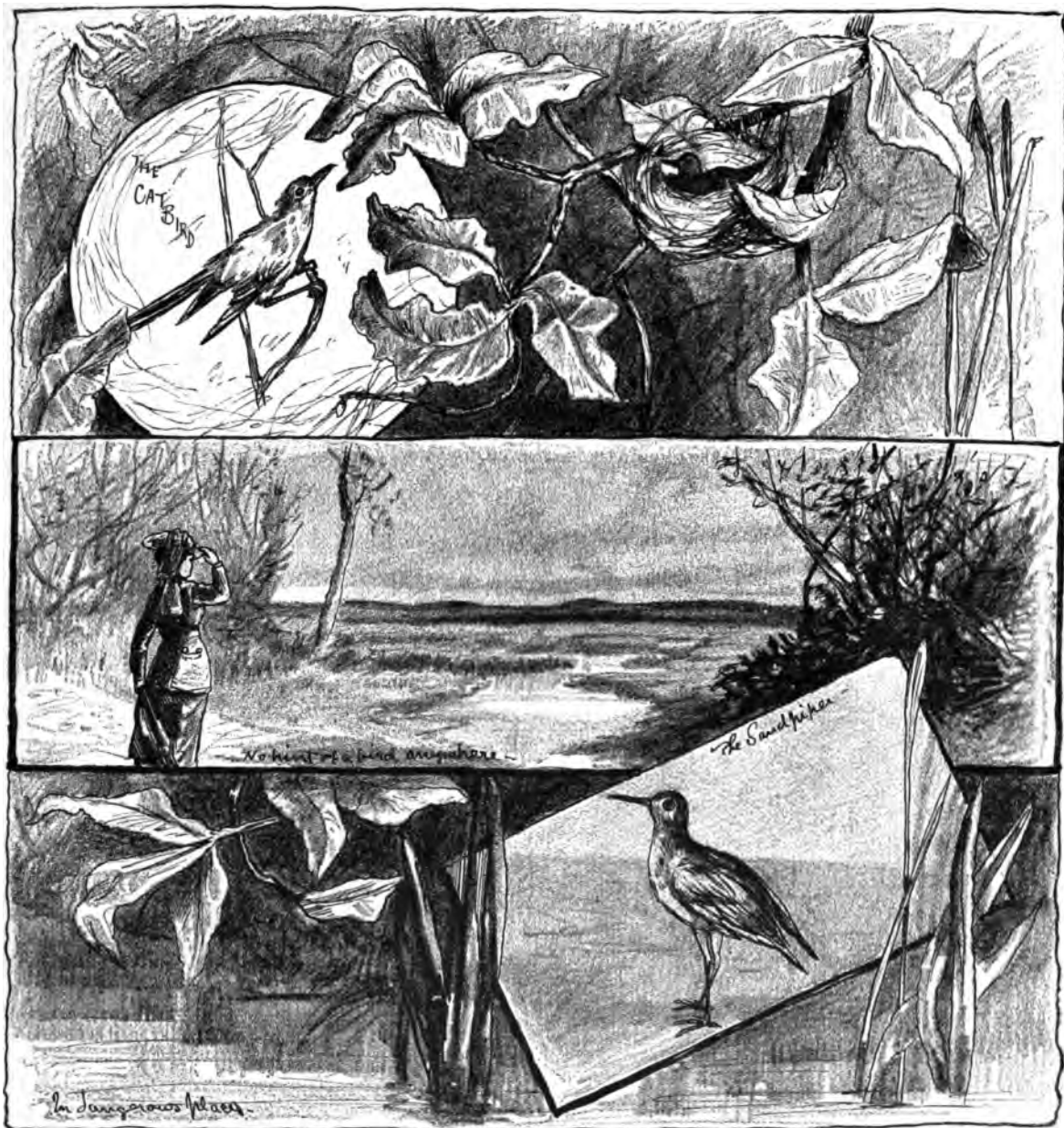
THE CAT-BIRD.

III.—THE CAT-BIRD.

We knew of so many cat-birds' nests nearer home, and had such good facilities for examining them in a thicket of syringa, rose and wax-berry bushes on our own premises that we did not think of such a thing as looking for them in our summer explorations; but we were glad indeed to linger over one which we came across that afternoon in the most retired part of the little wilderness that we afterwards almost came to look upon as our own property, since nobody ever seemed to go there except ourselves. And this reminds me anew of the deep satisfaction we had all through those long June days in wandering or waiting in its leafy recesses, where flecks of sunlight brightened the green half-twilight and dappled the soft floor variegated with fallen leaves and hundreds of shy plants and tender wild-wood flowers, where our only companions were the many brooding birds and their mates.

This cat-bird had done a marvelously ingenious but most risky thing, in locating her nest *between* two small hemlocks, just where the tip of the outermost branch of one lapped a bit on the corresponding tip of the other, so that if the wind had happened to sway them ever so slightly the result to the nest would have been the same as if it had been left loose in space, its foundations on nothing more tangible than air; and it would invariably have followed the same law of gravitation which influenced the falling apple made famous by Sir Isaac Newton.

But our wise little friend had calculated upon such a possible catastrophe, and acted accordingly, using some kind of foresight which we should call reasoning if a human being had done it. It chanced that a slim shoot of alder, tough and sinewy as a whip-lash, had grown up near by. This the bird had seized upon as the needful thing to make the place available. The over-lapping hemlock twigs were made to serve as the bottom and the walls of the nest, on which were laid up some fibres of dry roots and a few dead birch leaves. There the alder had been bent down and bound like a withe around the hemlocks, straining them together, then passed around and *through*



THE CAT-BIRD AND THE SANDPIPER.

THE SANDPIPER.

grass were four eggs — and what eggs they were! out of all proportion to her size, as if a dove should be sitting on a hen's eggs, they were anything but attractive, being nearly of a pear shape, and of greenish-yellow, blotched with brown at the heavier end. However, it was a satisfaction to have seen them and the cheap little nest. We have never had another opportunity, neither has there been so good a one for studying this daintiest of birds.

What a marvel of grace and loveliness she was! Only a slight, ashen-red bird: but how delicate and subtle were the shifting tints of that subdued color, or rarest mingling of colors, in that reddish, yellowish, grayish plumage set off with a shining ring on each tiniest feather's tip as beautiful in its diminutive way as those of a peacock, and lustrous as a bird-of-paradise. And such a fairy-fine form, of such exquisite finish! Her bill was long and slim, and she had slender legs on which she stood tall, and a nice light body; she was fashioned perfectly from tip to toe: and if her long, strong wings were good for flying, her wiry legs were as good for running, so she was equally at home on the ground or in the air — this nimble-footed, infantile, bewitching, irresistible Ariel of a bird.

III.

THE GRASS-FINCH, THE HERMIT-THRUSH, THE KING-BIRD, AND THE EAVE-SWALLOW.

I. — THE GRASS-FINCH.

PERHAPS I ought to have written about this bird before, because it was earlier in the season than the first of July that we found the first nest. I remember it on account of the day, which was so hazy that the warm, yellowish mist lay over all the landscape like the filmiest, airiest of gauze, through which the greenness of field and woodland showed dimly, as if they were about to melt away.

We were in an open pasture, on our usual errand, and there was this modest gray and brown bird, demurest of the sparrow kind. She was sitting in her lowly place under the least of tiny blueberry bushes, with one dried brake of last year arching over her—no, we did not see her sitting, for she stepped forth like a small lady from her house, just as if she meant to invite us in.

There are some birds whose plumage, nest, ways and surroundings are in perfect harmony, as is the case with certain individuals. There is a kind of fitness in everything they do, and that pertains to them. And this was the case with her; she seemed to belong with the subdued landscape and the quiet of the pasture. And then her attire of soft Quaker hues, her low home-song, her gentle manners, and her modest

THE HERMIT-THRUSH.

dwelling were all in accord. It was a cunning, wee nest, all in brown, made like a basket, too fragile to be lifted, but all right for its place on the ground, neatly lined with hair-like roots, and dried pine-needles, and containing her four pretty eggs. In these eggs, it must be confessed, she had departed a little from the grave taste manifested in everything else; for it was on a shell of the faintest green that the flecks of brown and dull lilac were scattered, giving a mere suggestion, only a hint, of color.

Several times before the summer was over we came upon one of those simple nests, under the protection of some miniature pine or hemlock, right out in the pasture where cows were feeding and over which boys and girls roamed in search of berries. And there, where any of these trampling hoofs of kine or feet of children were more likely than not to step, crushing the frail habitation and its inmates on the spot, the trustful creature sat, raising successfully one, two, or perhaps three broods.

II.—THE HERMIT-THRUSH.

Our thrush experiences were not so encouraging as they might have been, or as we thought we deserved; as anybody would say who knew how hard we worked, and how wearied and worried and burned we became following the old, tumble-down hedge fences, where the blackberry bushes tore our wrists and caught our clothes, only to be misled and cheated by the bird, or to find, after all, that we had worn ourselves out in trying to get to an empty nest.

What trials we did have, to be sure! For instance, that day when we determined that we *would* keep a pair of indigo-birds in sight till they went to their nest! We knew they had one by their staying round so, and we meant to stay them out; and we waited the whole afternoon; and *they* waited.

But they were more than a match for us in patience; or rather, let me say, time was to them of no consequence, though it was to us. However, of consequence or



THE GRASS-FINCH.

HOW WE WENT BIRDS'-NESTING.

not, we remained from noon till sunset of a midsummer's day, and we might have been worse employed, or have passed the hours in a place less agreeable.

It was on an old country road—delightful places those!—at a turn where a cluster of pines made a pleasant shade, and a little spring came trickling down the hill. On the other side was a house and a small orchard, and a few rods back there was a piece of woods. No doubt the nest was in one of those apple-trees; but the birds must guide us to it if we saw it at all, and that they would not do.

Never had birds sharper instinct than those. They had the divining faculties of a seer. They saw right through us as clearly as though it had been written on our faces. They read our purpose, and if birds could laugh at the foolishness of men, what “inextinguishable laughter” would they have indulged in! We shall not be likely to forget how leisurely they took things while pretending to be busy, with a good deal of unintelligible murmuring between themselves as they flew across the road and back fifty times over, and trifled with the pine cones, their vivid ultra-marine plumage like the flash of blue steel in the sunshine.

No better did we fare with the oven-birds, or the woodpeckers, or the blue-jays.

After considerable useless search for the “ingenious ovens,” we were told of a piece of ground where we could no doubt find a dozen of them by looking under the low blueberry bushes; but as there were seven acres, and every patch looked precisely like the next one, and they were the nests of birds that took very unusual pains to conceal them we decided to give up.

But about the woodpeckers—the dear, red-headed old friends, who had been wont to run up the trunks of our door-yard apple-trees ever since we could remember, who had lived through the winters on the bread crumbs and meat we had put out for them—not to be able to find *their* nests—oh! it was aggravating.

We fathomed the depths of hollow logs; we groped in the holes of decaying trees,

HOW WE WENT BIRDS'-NESTING.

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THE HERMIT-THRUSH.

thereby bringing an avalanche of rotten wood down upon us, and ousting colonies of big ants—but no sign of a nest then or ever.

Blue-jays' nests—there *were* none. Nobody ever saw one so far as we could learn. If we had only known that before! Before I climbed so many trees, so far up that I was afraid to come down—though in the end I did, of course, by dint of catching hold of the knotty places, and slipping over the smooth ones!

To begin with, they don't build high up; so that would have to be useless toil any way. They build where no school-boy, intent on birds'-nesting (from other motives than ours), has ever to my knowledge been able to find out; and that must account for the multitudes of these birds who make their appearance, in the best of spirits, just in season for the ripe corn and nuts—say about the first of October. They are bold enough then; but in the time of rearing their young they retire to the darkest recesses of the woods, where in silence they devote themselves to their families.

As to the thrush—we did several times start up a hermit-thrush, as we believe, and at last found the nest of the very hermit himself.

In the first instance we were sauntering home from our coppice, and as we proposed going home by way of the meadow we had crossed a foot-bridge and struck into a path by which the cows came down from their pasture. It was a darksome place, and in the most retired part one of those birds shot out of a thicket across our path and vanished. That time we sought in vain for the nest, staying so late that we had to come home over the meadow after the dews had fallen and the fire-flies were out and a whip-poor-will had begun his lonesome cry. The next time—later on in July—we were more fortunate. It was just such another secluded locality—a cart-path down into a swamp—where we had often heard while returning late a strangely sweet, wandering voice, the only one that broke the intense stillness, rising and falling with a pensive cadence of ineffable melody, and we supposed it to be that of this shy inhabitant



THE KING-BIRD AND THE HERMIT-THRUSH.

HOW WE WENT BIRDS'-NESTING.

of the wood, whose tawny plumage we hardly more than caught a glimpse of as it darted past us, as the other had, and disappeared. But the nest we found in a clump of high blueberry and hemlock bushes, made of coarse fibres and lined with rootlets, with a few crumbling leaves in the bottom, on which lay three eggs of a most exquisite fine blue.

III.—THE KING-BIRD.

Before that summer was over we were destined to see a great deal of the king-birds.

Hitherto we had not known them much, only as we cultivated their acquaintance down by the railroad, where we had long been in the habit of noticing them in the spring sitting on the telegraph wire—quite a company of them—where they seemed to enjoy themselves much, displaying their jet-black heads and plumage of bluish-ash color, now and then changing places as children do in that game where all leave their seats at a given signal and each slips into that of some one else; or like the old-fashioned spelling classes I remember, where the one who missed went to the foot, and the ones who were correct ranked up to the head—only in the case of the birds no mortal could tell what it was all about. Then it was amusing to see them all give a sudden start, as though some dispatch passing along the wire had literally electrified them; and they would take a turn in the air and then alight again, having shown, while on the wing, their handsome white-bordered tails, unfolded and spread out like a fan.

We had never known of their coming up to the village till that spring, when a pair made their appearance in our door-yard, not only showing no fear but being even more free in their approaches than those most familiar of our domestic birds, the robin and the chipping-sparrow.

They were almost ready to come in at the open window, advancing within a few feet after the strings we held out to them. They were evidently “prospecting;” and for about a week they examined this tree and that, being unable to come to any decision,

THE KING-BIRD.

but finally fixed upon an apple tree right opposite, across the road; and when they *had* decided, they stayed so. If there was fickleness before there was none afterwards, and both set to work in dead earnest and constructed a most excellent nest, doing it with such thoroughness that it stood there for more than a year after they were through with it.

That same season another pair followed their example of coming up this way, and began to build on an ash-tree in a neighbor's front yard; but a female gold-robin, whose nest was on a branch higher up, was so exasperated that she raved and stormed at them until they were glad to depart.

Though the male king-bird has the name of being able to fight a bird three times his size, like a hawk, or crow, this one would not have anything to do with such a spiteful little termagant.

A third pair chose a tree in a pear orchard more distant from the village, making an exceedingly nice nest which eventually came into my possession.

It was composed chiefly of the material known as excelsior, with which mattresses are filled, a manufactory for which stands about four miles up the river; but as that was too far even for a bird, we concluded that they must have had a streak of good luck in finding out where a bed had been emptied, or else this waste had been washed down stream by the spring freshet. That the stuff commended itself highly to them was proved by the lavish use they had made of it. It was densely packed to the depth of almost three inches, and surrounded by outworks of dry twigs. Within this solid wall, which was like a round tower almost, was a roomy cavity like a cup, all smoothly lined with horse-hair which had been intricately woven into the fibrous fabric of poplar wood (of which the excelsior is made), and near the top they had worked in some wool, laying lengthwise on it a covering of small feathers, which on examination proved to have belonged to a partridge, and these were bound down with hair so tightly that only the

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down could be seen. No possible reason could there be for this careful padding on the edge, except to make it soft for the sparsely-clad young ones to lean their necks against when they wanted to look over. In due time appeared the five roundish, creamy-white eggs freckled with brown and lavender.

The brood we did not happen to see, unless they were present many weeks later—as beyond a doubt they were—at the family rendezvous, by the railroad, preparatory to their southern migration—as if their goings and comings, like those of the human race, had to do with the trains and the telegraph.

IV.—THE EAVE-SWALLOWS.

Having set our hearts upon exploring among the bank-swallows' nests, we went on tiresome jaunts to every cut, and railroad embankment, and sand-pit, where they would be likely to be, to no purpose; and then, being fond of swallows of whatever species, we turned our attention to their kinsfolks who build under the eaves, asking persons who ought to know where we could find a settlement of them, and always receiving for answer that "they *used* to build" in such or such a place, but, from some cause, none had been seen thereabouts of late years.

The "*some* cause" we thought we understood; the truth being that there had been too many improvements going on, too much shingling, new clapboarding, painting and fixing up. Such things these birds can't bear. They want everything to remain as it is. They like the same old corner, or snug ledge, or space under the eaves trough. They are conservatives of the most extreme type. Change is what they cannot abide. They love the accustomed haunts where they can come and go with all the freedom of proprietorship. Like the blue-bird and the wren they go away in the autumn with the expectation of finding everything the same when they come back. In that case they stay on for years, reappearing with each returning spring—then they are fixtures, so far as

THE EAVE-SWALLOWS.

that can be said of a bird. And of eave-swallows, who had become permanent belongings, we heard at last—swallows with a *history*.

There must have been voluminous annals pertaining to them, an extended genealogy, a very branching family tree, if one could but have access to the same; for they had built there for thirty-six years, to the knowledge of the present owner, and much longer as he had every reason to believe—undoubtedly ever since there had been a human habitation on that spot, clinging to it though generations of the men and women had passed away.

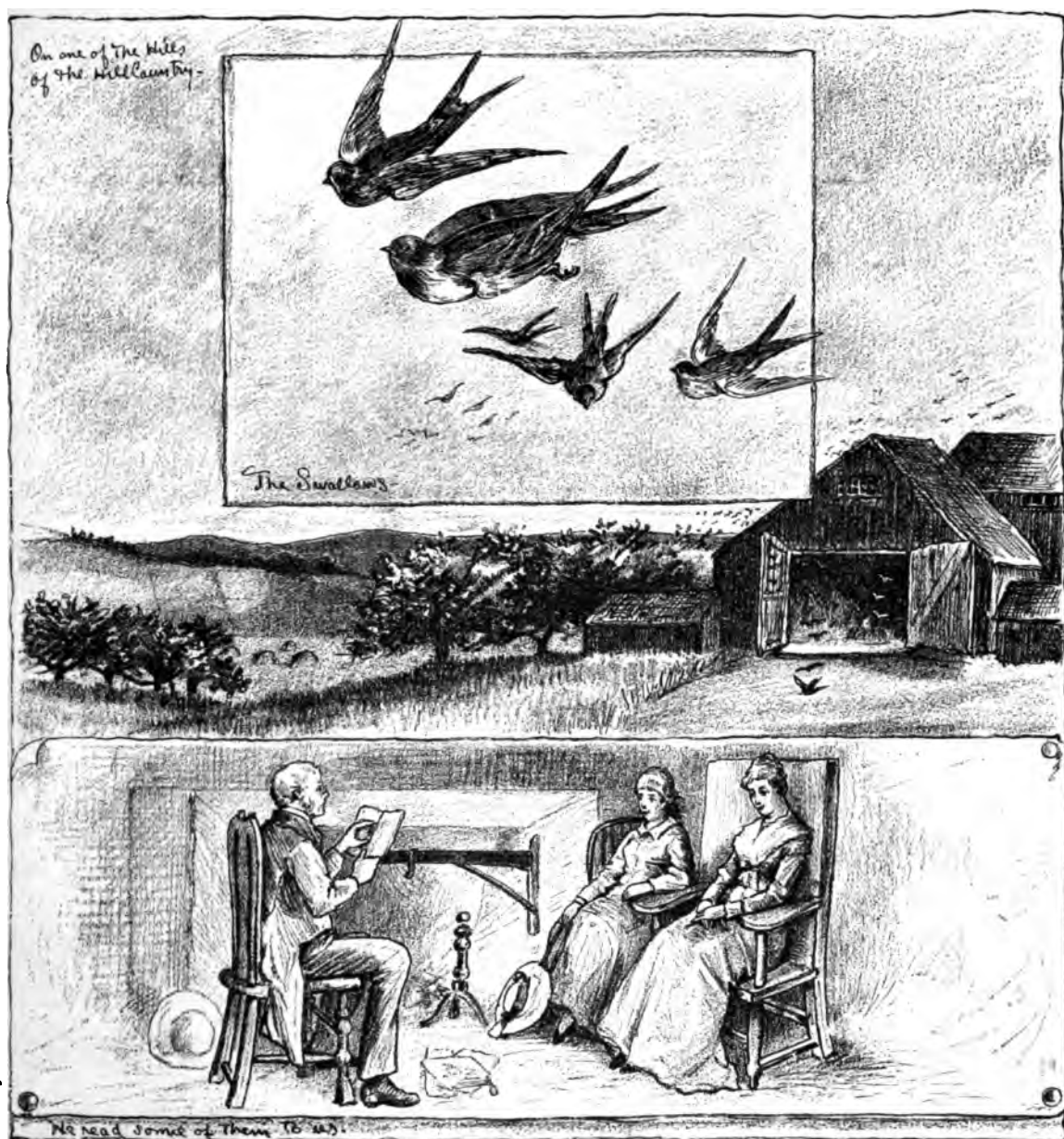
Now what was there, we asked each other, about this homestead which made the swallows love it so?

It was a farm-house and the out-buildings pertaining to it, in a sightly, sunny place on the level of a long swell of land—one of the hills of this hill country; orchards and mowing fields were to the right and the left and the back of it; and to the front, across the road, pleasant pastures sloped down to the green “runs,” over which bobolinks were floating, and the air was sweet and pure. That was what King Duncan noticed at the castle of Macbeth, where the “martlets” built under the eaves, and about its frieze and buttresses, and every “coigne of vantage—that the air

“Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.”

To which Banquo answered:

“This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet does approve
By his loved mansionry, * * * * *
Where they
Most breed and haunt, I have observed the air
Is delicate.”



THE EAVE-SWALLOW.

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HOW WE WENT BIRDS'-NESTING.

Ancestors of these very eave-swallows, perhaps, were those martlets of a bygone time beyond the seas. Yet why this one special farmstead should suit them more than many another we could see on the hilltops was a puzzle we were still unable to solve.

But the swallows had come and come again through these uncounted years, and there had been ninety nests of them at a time. We counted sixty, part of these in a dilapidated condition.

So much interested in them was the master that he had nailed strips of board along beneath them for their security. He had each year set down the dates of their arrival, and taking down his file of Leavitt's almanacs he read some of them to us, showing that the earliest appeared on the thirteenth of April, and that the average time was from the middle to the last of that month. One came on in advance, or perhaps two or three, and then in a few days they all arrived in companies, and soon began work building new nests and repairing such of the old ones as had been damaged over winter.

He said they had some little quarrels among themselves, though nothing serious; also that they formerly waged war against the pewee whom they would not allow about there, yet had become more tolerant lately, as at the time of our last visit there was actually a pewee's nest within their quarters.

Now their quarters were just these: beyond the house were three or four barns and other out-buildings on two sides of a large enclosure where the cattle were yarded at night, where the yoking of oxen, the harnessing of horses and milking of cows went on. Between two of the barns and beneath another, facing south, was a deep, low shed for the cattle to go under, and *that* was where the nests were.

They were ranged all along the beams overhead, almost near enough for a tall person to reach into them, and where the branching horns of the oxen could come dangerously near, if they chose to toss their heads aloft. The birds, however, minded nothing

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about these neighbors, who, seen from their point of view, must have seemed of immense stature—the truth really being that birds are fond of cattle.

The nests were generally as close together as so many tenements in a block; in other words, they joined one another. Every one had literally built against his neighbor, so that one partition wall served for a side to two dwellings. Still, there was no way of communication. Each had his own small entrance, just big enough for one to go in at; and as the occupant usually sat so near it that he could keep his head out, it is obvious that nobody else could get in.

Well, it was a very, very comical sight. The nests were of the color of clay, and shaped like a gourd turned over on its side, the place where the handle would be curving downward, and *there* was the hole, like the entrance to the kraal of a Zulu's or a Laplander's hut. And out of each of these holes, as we drew near, popped a head; and such a funny head it was too—bright chestnut color, with a steel-blue patch on it, and the pair of eyes were like two bright, black beads, and the bill like a small black wedge, and the head was so round, and so glossy and rich, and the tiny, triangular bill was so queer! The plump shoulders were chestnut-colored, too, and so was the neck; and under the chin—if a bird *has* a chin—was another steel-blue spot, as if these were symbols of some kind, the decorations or insignia of some mystic order.

They all eyed us a minute, seeing that we were strangers—then with one consent more than half of them took flight, almost sweeping our faces as they rushed out, and sought the yard, over which they continued to circle round, twittering and saying things about us, until, thinking it was too bad to have startled a whole settlement in this way, we moved just outside the shed, when back they all went and settled down as if nothing had happened.

The owner told us that they would not have minded our presence after a few

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minutes. He said that in building they work very fast, choosing a good drying day, bringing small pellets of clay which they cement together with their saliva—but as they make use of no hair, or none of any consequence, a whole side is liable to fall down, especially if they have done it too rapidly, not waiting for it to harden sufficiently, whereupon they repair damages, nothing discouraged. After putting a few feathers and cows' hairs in the bottom, it is ready for the little pearly speckled eggs.

Two broods are often reared in the season; and though most of the colony scatter abroad through the day in quest of food, night-fall brings them all back; but where they could all lodge after the families had increased was a mystery to me.

In this way they stayed by through the summer, sunset never failing to start them home—a social, very noisy company, as we could testify, almost making the air dark, and keeping up that cheerful twittering till the tireless wings were folded for the night.

By the last of August the young are all grown strong for the journey before them, and by the first of September they all start for the South.

IV.

THE CHEBÊC, THE BALTIMORE ORIOLE AND THE CHIMNEY-SWALLOW.

I.—THE CHEBÊC.

ALTHOUGH we went roving about so on our ornithological expeditions, we by no means failed to keep our eyes open to what was going on nearer home. There is a great deal of bird-life being lived every summer right over our heads — whether we heed it or not — in the chimney-tops and belfries, and in the shade trees that hang over our eaves. All around us, unobserved by half the people who pass, all along the streets, this bird community is acting out, in its humble but not unintelligent or unintelligible way, some of the very passions and moods that are experienced by human beings.

If you want to draw birds immediately about you, so that they will seem in a certain sense your own, and so that they can feel that the portion of the earth's surface which you occupy is theirs also, that your garden and small patch of land belong to them, too, as much as if they had a legal right of ownership, a clear title secured by a genuine warrantee deed, why, then you must have trees and vines and shubbery; and, moreover, you must not be too particular about the way in which they grow.

In other words, you must not be anxious to clear up every corner. What if a few rose-bushes and syringas are left to make themselves into a tangle, and encroach on the ground you wanted for something else? It is just what the birds like. They take a lawless kind of



THE CHEBEC.

HOW WE WENT BIRDS'-NESTING.

delight in dodging about in such darksome thickets, and many a little brood may be cuddled in such an unpropitious-looking place, reared and sent forth into the world, and nobody ever the wiser, until some day an empty nest is discovered.

And you must not prune away all the decayed branches from the trees; for if there is one perch that seems more desirable to a bird than any other, it is the topmost tip of a very dead branch indeed.

And be sure to spare a few briar bushes that may come up on the outskirts of your domain; and let the wild black cherry trees stand, though your best friend entreat you to cut them down. There is nothing more to the taste of a bird — according to my observation — than those juicy, half-sweet, astringent, winy little cherries. And he knows just as well when they will begin to turn, as the school-boy does when the early apples will be ripe. Besides, this, more than any other of the fruit-bearing trees, is full of crawling and creeping and flying things which the insect-eating species of birds will dig out or snap up, returning to this well-stocked store-house many times daily for their meaty luncheons. The hole in the trunk or the caterpillar's nest is as useful to them as the *cache* of reserved supplies which the hunters and trappers of the North-west have to fall back upon in case of need.

If it had not been for these mites and borers, the midgets and curculios, the caterpillars and millers, the winged and many-legged nondescript things which the old fruit trees harbored, we should never have had so many of the woodpeckers and orioles, the creepers and warblers. And we never could have been as intimate as we were with the least of the fly-catcher family.

Summer after summer they came, minding nothing about our presence, so intent were they on securing their flighty prey; flirting their tails like a pewee, and calling out: "*chebéc, che-béc!*" with their mouths full — "*chebéc, che-béc-tr-tr-tree-o-che!*" Then away they went; birds that seemed not to have a care in the world, fearing nothing, and worrying about nothing. Food was plenty, and might be had for the catching. And how nimbly that was done!

Once a reckless little explorer, while reconnoitring about an aged Canada plum tree, close

THE BALTIMORE ORIOLE.

by the house, spied a fly within hovering over the dinner-table, and he dashed in at the open window, snapped up the unsuspecting victim, and was out again, and all done as coolly as if this performance, this cutting a circle, and making a raid on another's premises, and seizing a house-fly on the wing, was a stroke of business he was accustomed to, an acrobatic feat he had been in the habit of practising all his life.

It was not until after ten years of their annual coming to us that we were able to find a nest. This one was in the fork of an apple tree, and was not much larger than a humming-bird's nest; made of everything that was soft, as nice bits of cobweb, and cotton and silk of seed-pods, and all such fluffy things, laid inside of finest roots and the most pliant of grasses. It was as round as a cup, and trim as if it had been clipped, and in the bottom were five plump, white, shining eggs, round at one end and tapering at the other, so fine of form, so finished and ivory fair that, seeing such perfection on a scale so minute, one could not help thinking of a lily-of-the-valley. When the young were hatched—a queer little bunch, so fuzzy and round and dumpy, of such a paly yellow in their sparse covering—they looked less like birds than a brood of faded-out bumble-bees.

II.—THE BALTIMORE ORIOLE.

It is curious to observe how capricious birds sometimes are about building, and how some slight circumstance will cause them to change their plans, or delay, or abandon their work. They are especially affected by the weather. Nothing disheartens them like a high wind. We had three windy days in succession about the time when some of them were just beginning. The sky was brassy with yellow light, the dry street was swept as clean as if done with a broom, the gritty dust was sifted into the houses, the leaves were all turned wrong side up, and everything in the outward world seemed under a miserable spell. And the birds showed it as much as anything. They were annoyed to desperation. The wind blew their feathers almost over their heads, like so much ruffled, furbelowed drapery set a-flying, till the owners,

HOW WE WENT BIRDS'-NESTING.

half beside themselves, began to make querulous protest, as if they could put a stop to it.

Everything was out of tune; everything was disturbed. Some sparrows came and sat by the hour in the top of an old pear tree, and looked the country over with an air of abject hopelessness. They had contemplated building near us, but they never did. An oriole, however, had already begun, and her nest was well along when this blasting simoon came on. It was the female who had done the work. She is usually the one. She seems to think herself more capable than her mate, and therefore only allows him to bring material, after which he may sit by and look on, but on no account meddle.

This one had selected a branch of an elm, so near the house that we could see everything she did. And on the bright mornings, before the wind began to blow, we had watched her as she fastened the cords, then twitched, and yanked, and pulled away at them, bracing her feet till she nearly fell over backwards, putting so much violence into her work that she must have tired herself all out in a little while, as was doubtless true; for we noticed that she did not do anything on it except for an hour or two at that time of day.

She had been engaged upon it four mornings, and on the fifth she came the same as usual. It was then blowing a gale, the branch was swaying, and the leaves fluttered like rags. She looked at the half completed nest, waited a while as if meditating, then flew away, and never came back to it. And the pretty hammock, which she had slung on the twigs, held fast, not only through that wind but through the storms and blasts of the next twelve months, and at this very moment is swinging in a summer breeze.

But this could not have been a case of mere discouragement. The place was the one of her first choice, safe, convenient, sightly, beautiful, where she could sit and see the morning sun, and look down on the world below. If it had been on the *third* day of the wind, it would seem reasonable that she might have succumbed in sheer despair; but under the circumstances I believe it was temper. There is nothing like the female oriole for temper. A few instances are all that is needed in proof.

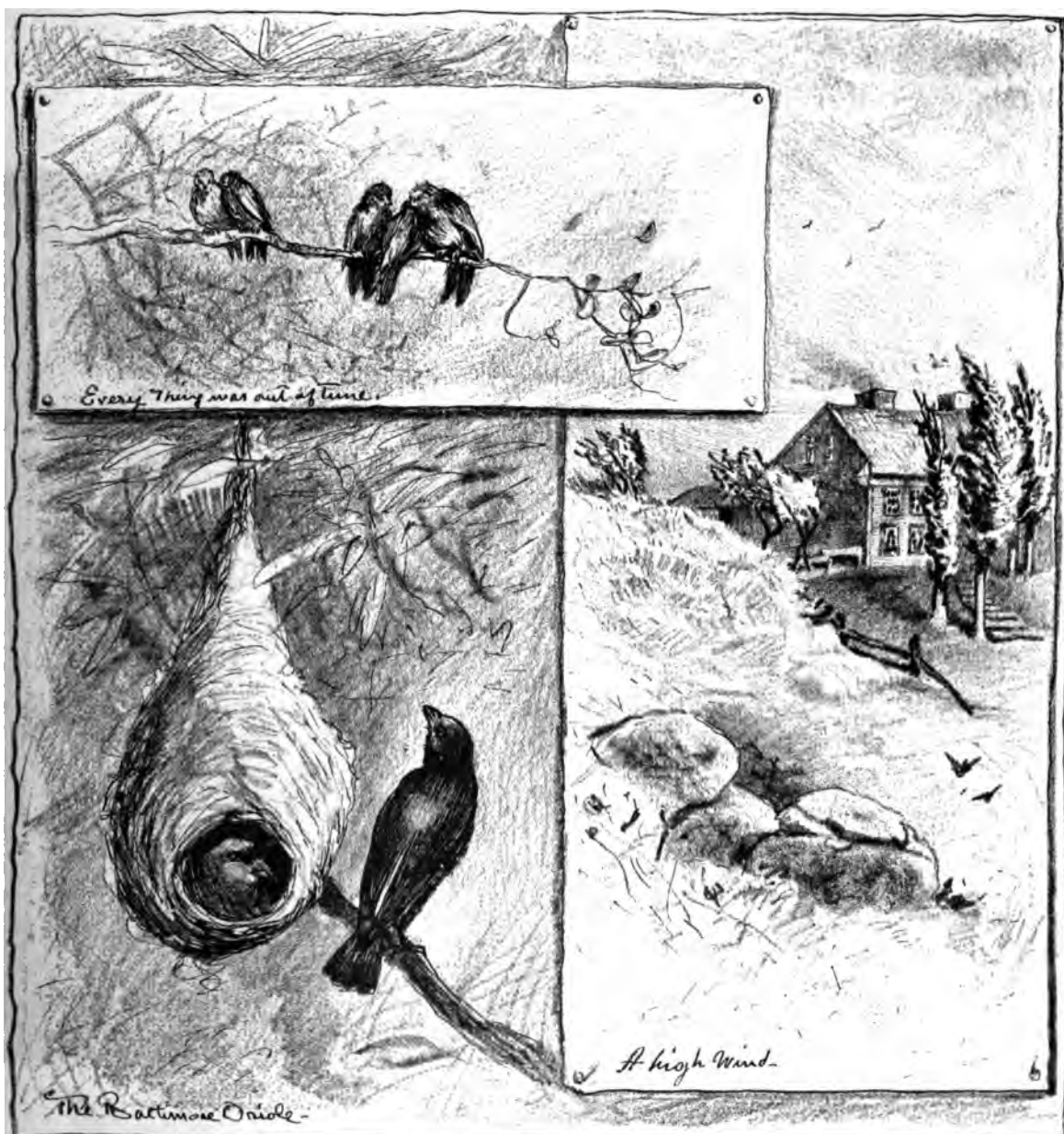
THE BALTIMORE ORIOLE.

That same summer, on a different elm, were an oriole's and a robin's nest, both held in peaceful possession as far as one could judge. The latter was already occupied by a brood, half grown; and one day, in the absence of their parents, dame oriole steps across the way to this unoffending neighbor's domicile, snatches up one of these defenceless little ones, carries it a step or two, then with all her might hurls it far out into space, and watches it fall the long way down to the ground, which it strikes with a thud that beats the breath out of its body.

Knowing this fact, and that another of these sweet-dispositioned creatures was seen and heard raving so at her mate, for daring to tuck a piece of string into the nest when she was not there, that he flew away and hid from her fury, or rather betook himself to a place far off from her — knowing these things, it is quite safe to presume that another one, which got hung and so died, was the victim of her own passion. She might have accidentally become entangled in one of the nooses with which she was fastening a strand in her nest; but more likely she was so blinded with rage at something that did not go to suit her that she actually lassoed herself, and so met with that awful fate, although it has been suggested that she did it intentionally — hung herself.

But I don't think that a bird would commit suicide. Cats have been known to — if we can believe the story — and dogs. An elephant is capable of doing such a thing; and horses, where there is no Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, have abundant cause to, but not birds. Still, the fact remains, she was hung; and, as nobody could reach her, there the poor thing dangled at the door of her own house till her feathers and flesh wasted away and the little white skeleton only was left.

And now I begin to feel some compunctions of conscience for telling these dreadful things, especially since one book on ornithology calls the orioles "genial," which must be a figure of speech. Genial! To whom? Why, they are sometimes worse than the Philistines of old towards other tribes; and they have been suspected of demolishing the nests of smaller birds — circumstantial evidence being against them.



THE BALTIMORE ORIOLE.

HOW WE WENT BIRDS'-NESTING.

But there are things to offset all this. Such liquid sweetness, such rapture, such a gush of melody, such exhilaration as there is in that triumphant song of his! There is all the freshness of May in it, the blueness of the sky, the beauty of apple-blossoms, the fragrance of violets — all the sweetness and loveliness and newness of the spring in one bird's voice.

And what a glory of color he is! And what a toiler is she; so painstaking, so diligent, so skilful! Of the ancient craft of weavers, what a web she makes without either loom or shuttle. Those pensile nests are all alike with a difference, pouches of interlaced hempen string and tough fibres of bark and the like, threaded through and through with long hairs from a horse's mane or tail; woven as no hands could do it; strong, durable, tight, warm, and elastic as crinoline — a piece of work to be wondered at and admired.

It is not so easy a matter to get sight of the particolored decorated eggs, of varying tint, from bluish to roseate, adorned with lines and dots, scratches and dashes in russet and lavender. But the young are apt to make themselves visible in an almost calamitous way; for, venturing to peep over the threshold of their home too soon, they are likely to come tumbling down, using their wings just enough to save themselves from harm, but not able to fly to a place where they will be safe from marauding cats. If, beholding the accident, you pick up the rash adventurer and set him on some post, and then wait and listen, you will find that no sooner has he lifted up his voice than from some quarter one or both the parents appear, and manage to comfort him, keeping a vigilant watch over him till you are off your guard, when, by some trick which is equal to any sleight-of-hand performance, they spirit him out of sight and hearing in as whist a way as if they were conspirators or fugitives for their lives.

III. — THE CHIMNEY-SWALLOW.

Who ever did such a thing as to go a-birds'-nesting up a chimney, unless it was that delectable writer and naturalist, White of Selborne, or perhaps Buffon who seems to know as much about the place and the feathered inhabitants of it as if he too

THE CHIMNEY-SWALLOW.

had lived in a flue? There are wonderful doings up there where the swallows have it all their own way—and a curious folk they are. Who ever sees them build, and when and how do they do it? And when and where do they pick up all those short twigs, and how can they carry them with those tiny triangles of bills and dainty feet? And how comes it that they have such supplies of glue in their own throats, and how does it happen that this home-made mucilage will stick so fast and sure? And by what kind of manipulation—if a process may be so called in which no hands are engaged—do they fashion those shallow, saucer-shaped nests which are so black and shiny, and which look so much like wee wicker baskets? And how unaccountable it is that they should have such lovely, milk-white eggs, which are so long and so slim, and look all ready to slip out if anything should give the nest a jar! And how strange it is that they come with food in the night, reversing the order of the universe by bringing meat to their chicks when most other little birds are asleep! All along at intervals through the still hours, the rustle of their stiff wings may be heard as they skim or slide down the flue, and the rumble like far-off thunder when they go out. And in the dead of the night too they have been heard to call to one another and twitter, and make the loneliness less lonely with their cheerful “*tsp — tsp — tsp — tsee!*”

Birds of the soot and darkness indeed are they; but they come out unsmirched, not a feather out of place, not a blemish on the smooth olive-brown plumage. It would seem a depressing sort of atmosphere in which to live, yet there is not anywhere to be found a family of birds so animated, so sweet-tempered, so joyous as they, who are not only heartsome themselves but heartsome to all who know them; who make this world a happier place to be in, and all the summer twilights more enchanting, as they flock and circle up overhead and chatter to one another in neighborly gossip, and say pleasant things in those small voices whose sweet, vivacious notes are the next best thing to



THE CHIMNEY-SWALLOW.

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THE BALTIMORE ORIOLE.

BIRDS THAT DIDN'T BUILD.

door, and even flying in at the windows, but when it came to nest-building they were too secretive for us to find one out.

The barn-swallows were most ungrateful, for after having had an opening made for their convenient entrance and exit, they scrutinized every foot of the cob-webbed rafters, partially repaired an antique nest, and then disappeared over night to return no more.

But our great disappointment was about the wren. As every body knows there are almost no house-wrens left in this part of the country. For some reason unexplained, they have deserted us, or become a nearly extinct race, whereas they used to build in any such place of advantage as a hole in a fence-post or in the well-house, or where a brace in the wood-shed had shrank away, or even in an augur-hole, or any aperture that they could creep into and turn round in after the nest was in it.

Enquire where you will, there are now no wrens. But after many years one came to us—the genuine, old-fashioned, vociferous, chattering, saucy wren. From somewhere in the vast unknown where she had been abiding, she suddenly made her presence in the barn-yard known by her impertinent salutation and warning, which meant that she had begun a nest and that it was none of our business, and that we were to keep away from it, or there would be trouble. From that *somewhere* sharp eyes had seen that one of the posts of a tumble-down building had settled so much that a tenon had dropped out of its mortise, leaving a deep hole just adapted for a nest: and already a few sticks and a tuft of wool had been put down the opening, so that there seemed no question about it—we should soon see what we *should* see, eight or ten cunning little eggs, as brown and as trig as hazle-nuts, and then it followed that there would be wrens once more.

Just then, outside of the fence in the long grass a wicked tail was to be seen waving like a tiger's when she is preparing to spring. And after that—there was no bird. A vagabond cat had extinguished a race, and devoured the last of the wrens.

HOW WE WENT BIRDS-NESTING.

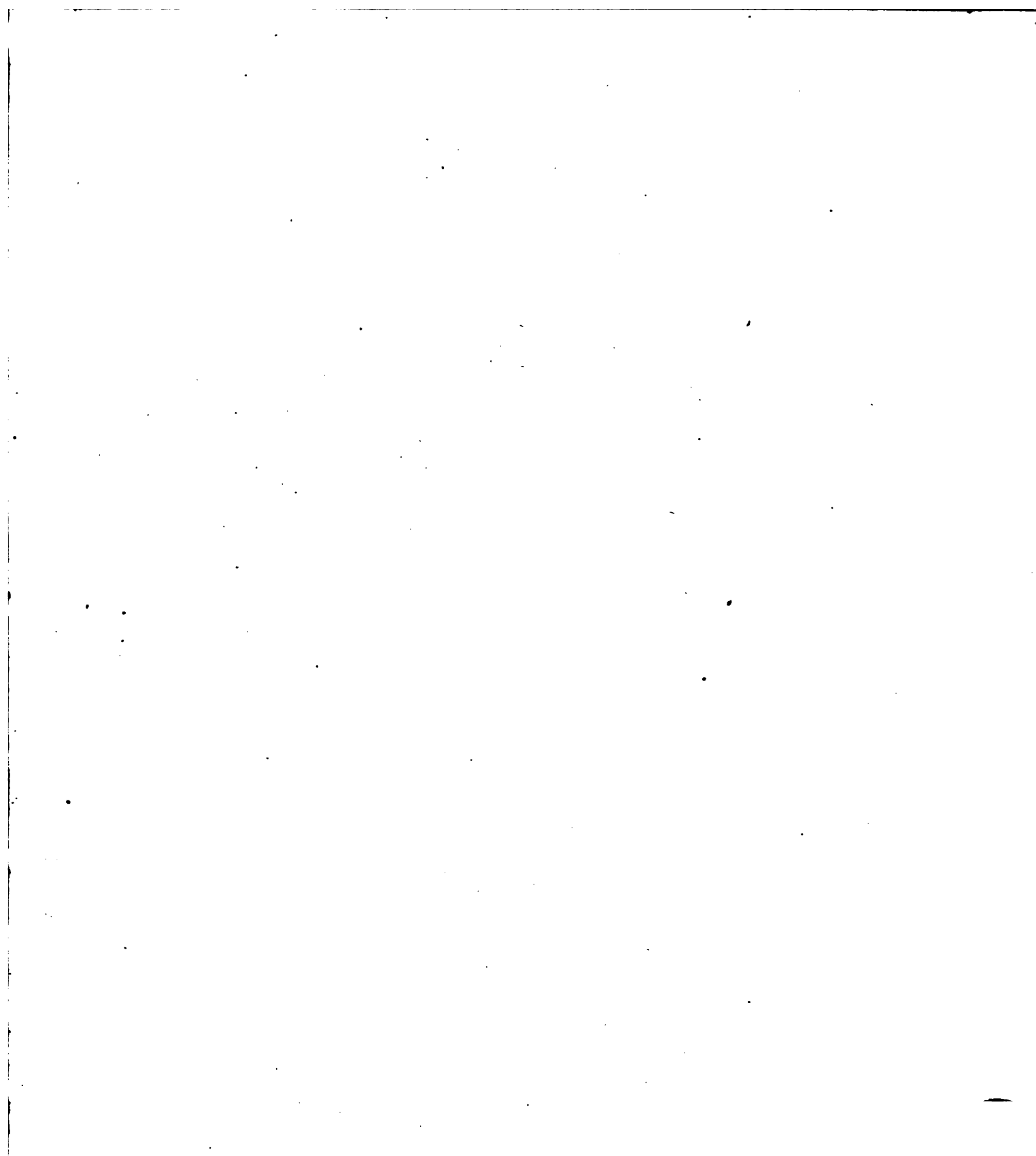
Such were some of the happenings and findings of that summer. We did not know that so many trained naturalists were abroad, and that John Burroughs and Ernest Ingersoll and others had such delightful papers in store.

We then were not acquainted with the descriptions given by Wilson or Audubon. Nor had we met with those fascinating books on British birds — Yarrell's, full of pictures, full of charming reading; and the old, unabridged Bewick, with each bird amidst its fit surroundings, from the drowsy owl on the top of a ruin and the quail in the grass, to the lone flamingoes and herons in marshy places.

Yes: it was all in the books — if we had only had them!

All but the best part. All but the glory of the summer skies, the freshness of the air of June, the cool, green coverts, the shadowy wood-paths, the ripple of waters. All but our own experience of those perfect days, and the seeing and the hearing and knowing for ourselves.





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